Figure 8 is a side view of the alternative embodiment of the invention.

Figure 9 is a top view of another alternative embodiment of the invention.

Figure 10 is a side view of the other alternative embodiment of the invention.

Please insert the following paragraphs at page 7, line 23.

In an alternative embodiment, shown in figures 7, 8, the ear-nut includes gripping tabs 22. Each tabs 22 is a single strut, and the tabs 22 are positioned in-line with each other, on opposing edges of base plate 26. Tabs 22 are offset from fingers 12 by substantially ninety degrees. For illustration purposes, the cross sectional shape of tabs 22 in Figures 7, and 8 is circular.

In another alternative embodiment, shown in figures 9, and 10, tabs 22 are indented. The tabs 22 are indented so that the bottom ends 23 of tabs 22 are radially inward of the edges of the base plate 26. The indentation of tabs 22 allows for a more comfortable grip of the ear nut. For illustration purposes, the cross sectional shape of tabs 22 in Figures 9, and 10 is square.

Yet alternatively, tabs may be curved inward (not shown) for providing a more comfortable grip to a user. In this embodiment, edge 23 of tabs 22 might be on opposing edges or radially inward of the edges of the base plate 26.

The dimensioning of tabs 22, as illustrated in figures 7 and 8, allows a user to comfortably grip the ear nut and either engage or disengage the ear nut from an earring post. The dimensioning of tabs 22 can also be a function

of the material so that a desired weight, and material cost, can be maintained. For example, if the ear nut is formed from 14 karat gold, tabs 22 can be shorter than if the ear nut is formed from sterling silver. The length of tabs 22 need only be that required to connect metal separator 40 to the ear nut.

An option for forming the tabs 22 of Figures 7 through 10 includes stamping the ear-nut from a single piece of material, where the stamped product includes base plate 26, friction fingers 12, separator 40 and tabs 22. According to this option, the cross-sectional shape of tabs 22 would be rectangular. An alternative option for forming the tabs 22 includes casting or wire forming tabs 22 separately from the remainder of the ear nut structure and hard soldering tabs 22 to the ear nut structure. According to the alternative option, the cross-sectional shape of tabs 22 could be circular or rectangular. Furthermore, the cross sectional area of tabs 22 is equal to or smaller than the cross sectional area of the friction fingers 12, which reduces the weight of the ear nut.

The surface of tabs 22 may be treated (not shown) to assist a user in gripping the tabs 22. For example, the tabs 22 may be have a surface that is smooth, fluted, corrugated, hatched with a criss-cross, or formed with a raised stippled surface.

In use, holding the gripping-tabs of the ear nut, an earring is secured against an ear by comfortably inserting the earring post 14 (Figure 2) through opening 28, so that the fingers 12 frictionally engage post 14. The earring is removed from the ear by gripping the gripping tabs 22, rather than any other part of the ear nut, and pulling the ear nut away from the earring post 14. The separator 40

prevents the user from improperly pressing the gripping tabs 22 against each other or improperly pressing the friction fingers against the earring post. Accordingly, the gripping tabs 22 prevent the user from creating excessive forces that inhibit the putting on or removal of the earring post

In the Claims:

Please cancel original claims 1-18 and add the following new claims:

19. An ear nut comprising:

a. a base plate having an opening for receiving a post of an earring;

b. first and second friction fingers for gripping the earring post, said gripping fingers extending from substantially opposing positions on said base plate;

c. first and second gripping tabs, wherein:

i. each of said tabs being a single strut, each tab having a first end connected to said base plate, on substantially opposing positions of said base plate, offset from said friction fingers;

ii. each of said tabs having a second end extending away from said first end; and

d. a separator attached to the second end of each of said tabs, said separator having a shape that clears the post of an earring.

20. The ear nut of claim 19, where said opening in said base plate having a funnel shaped depression.